

Why We Still Need Feminism in the World

The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics defines feminism as: a way of looking at the world which women occupy from the perspective of *women*. It has at its central focus the desire to understand and dismantle the concept of patriarchy. This can be described as a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions. Feminism originated as a historical movement to work towards bettering the lives of women, but in recent times it has been looked at as a negative thing (McLean and McMillan). One popular belief is that feminists are “anti-man” and that they hate men. That is not even close to true; feminists want equal treatment and respect for all people. Sadly, this equality is still not a reality in America or in developing countries around the world. Women deserve to have their struggles voiced just as all people do, and the most important of these issues is ending the silence on global sexual oppression.

Most women in developing countries are not even considered a whole person. They are valued as half of a man (*The Honor Diaries*). These women are fighting for necessary rights, such as the right to publically speak to a man, dress however they choose, drive a car, get an education, and choose to love whomever they want. Comparatively, American women have many advantages. We have greater access to education and we can make choices about careers, a family, and our futures. In countries such as Somalia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan forced marriage is very common. 60 million girls are married before the age of eighteen (*The Honor Diaries*). Once they are married, the girls are pulled out of school and their main responsibility is to become a mother and to carry on the family’s “honor”.

In many countries, the honor of an entire family is placed on a woman’s body and how she chooses to use it (*The Honor Diaries*). Women are considered “dishonorable” and a disgrace

to their family if they use social media, do not wear the customary headscarf, are seen talking or looking at a man, have a driver's license, attempt to get a divorce, or even if they are sexually assaulted. These things are punishable by beatings, whippings, rape, acid, and death. In *The Honor Diaries*, a 19-year-old girl, who was in a forced marriage, was given an ultimatum by her mother: she either had to stay with her abusive husband, or she had to kill herself. The girl chose to do neither, and pursued a divorce. As a result, the mother was so angered by her actions that she strangled her daughter to death. The weight of "honor" must be lifted.

Muslim majority nations are among some of the worst perpetrators of female restrictions. This is because they abide by a fundamentalist form of Sharia, or Islamic law, over the national law. Following strict Sharia law, women are not allowed to vote, must wear the full traditional Muslim dress, they must be under male guardianship their whole lives, and they are not allowed to divorce unless they have the husband's consent; however, he is allowed to leave her at any time, even without informing her. Manda Zand Ervin is a political refugee from Iran who stated in *The Honor Diaries*, that Iran has gone backwards in women's rights in recent years, all due to the enforcement of Sharia law. Another horrific example of an honor killing is the case of a fifteen year old girl who looked at a boy and her parents punished her by throwing acid on her until she died from the burns (*The Honor Diaries*). Treatment like this cannot be tolerated any longer.

Most Americans cannot fully begin to understand what women in many developing and even many modern countries endure. Between 5,000 and 20,000 women fall victim to honor killings yearly, and even more are forced into arranged marriages (*The Honor Diaries*). Shockingly, there are also about 1,500 arranged and forced marriages in the US each year. Honor killings are even happening in the US, despite Western country's homicide laws. Awareness on

these killings, and the meaning behind them needs to become common knowledge so that we can bring an end to innocent lives been taken in tragic ways.

Females as a united group around the world suffer and often have low self-esteem and self-worth. However we can change attitudes with increased education and awareness. In *The Honor Diaries*, Raheel Raza states that “nothing is more powerful than a group of women coming together, sharing their experiences and taking action” and this is extremely powerful. Together, women can stand together to combat these injustices and fight for our deserved equality in a global scale. The first step is to create awareness, and stop the silence.

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